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HISTORIC DECORATION—II.

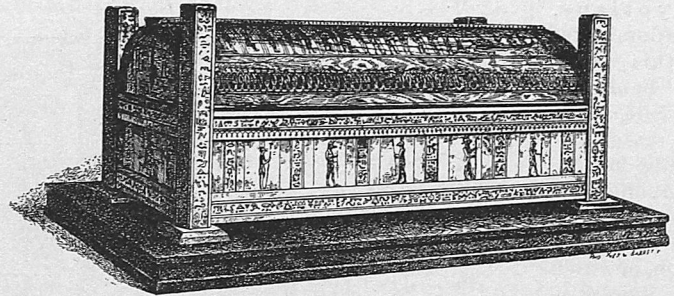


THE EGYPTIAN STYLE.

By PAUL ROUAIX.

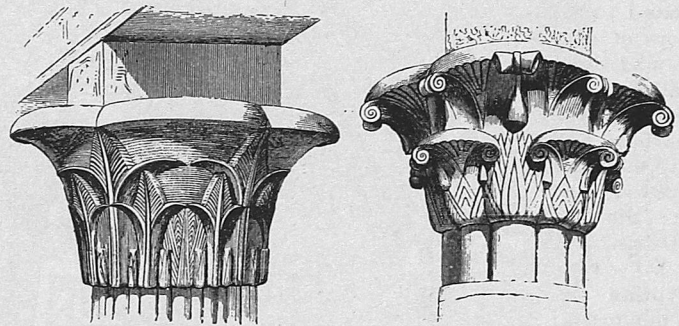
THE antiquity of Egyptian art, and the influence it exerted upon the Greek and Etruscan arts, render it especially interesting. The characteristic impression which it produces is one of austere grandeur, noble simplicity, and sacred majesty. Stability, immovable solidity, a genius for the conception and application of firmly seated and massive forms, the love of what was imposing, colossal, were, together with hieratic rigidity and symbolical decoration, the characteristics of this style, which endured through so many centuries.

As if the vertical did not fully satisfy that tendency to massive solidity, the external faces of the structures were inclined toward each other. This form, which created the pylones that specially distinguish Egyptian architecture, asserts itself in the tapering of the columns, even in their capitals, and it triumphs in the pyramids. Every Egyptian monumental work affects as a whole either the form of a pyramid, or that of the frustum of a pyramid. A sort of cornice curves upward and outward above the pylones and over the doorways. The only external decorations of the monuments consist of gigantic representations of personages in standing or sitting attitudes. In the interior, how-



Egyptian Sarcophagus in Painted Wood, with Mummy Covered with Ornamented Plaques.

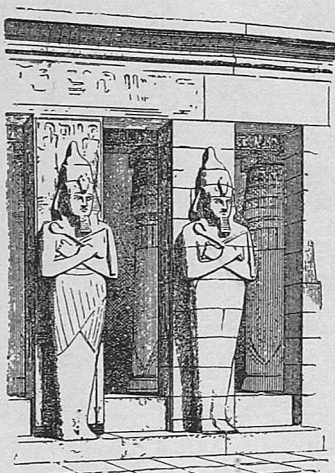
ing to the sides, or upright, in a walking attitude, with long feet, one placed in front of the other, with narrow loins, and both shoulders facing the spectator, even when the personage is standing sideways; the heads are represented in profile, while the eye is drawn as if these heads were shown in full face. The costume consists of a kind of small skirt forming in front a sharply angular straight fold. The headgear exhibits in front



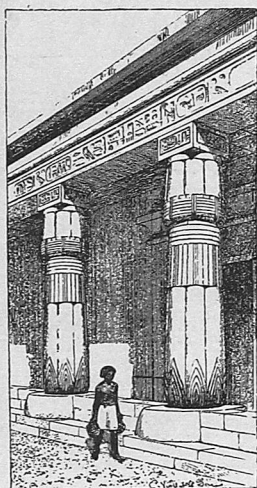
Papyrus and Lotus Capitals, from the Temple of Philæ.

the ureus or sacred serpent, whose head rises up threateningly above the coils of the body.

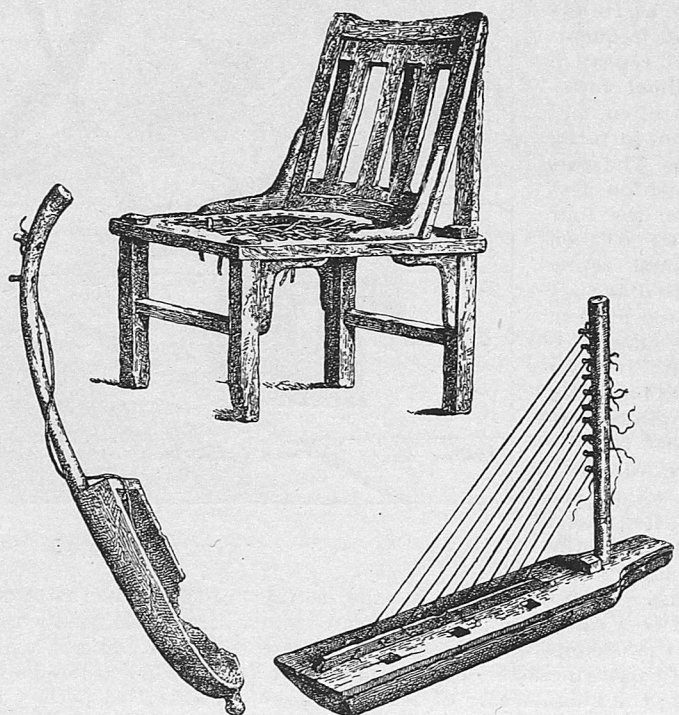
The gods, provided with symbolical attributes, usually have a human body surmounted by an animal's head, like Rha, with the hawk's head; Sekhet, with the head of a cat or of a lioness; Osiris, who bears on his forehead a disk between two horns. In



Pylons Enriched with Sculptured Gods.



Egyptian Colonnade.



Egyptian Wooden Chair and Harps.

ever, are forms which recall the vegetable world, represented by columns, the bases of which frequently simulate a bulb, while their capitals either flare boldly out like a full-blown lotus-flower or are compressed above so as to imitate the form of a truncated lotus bud. The Egyptian personages are represented either sitting, with the hands resting on the knees and the elbows cling-

the sphinx, on the contrary, the human head is found placed upon the body of an animal.

While it may be said that the Egyptian system of inspections is in reality a system of design, Egyptian art may also be regarded as a sort of written record. It is, so to speak, a written language, the words, or syllables or letters of which are pictorially represented.

Symbolism, which is the very principle of the religion of the Egyptians, predominates in this art of the banks of the Nile, which is essentially a religious art. Symbolism inspires the entire ornamentation, of which the most frequent motives are the scarabeus, emblem of immortality, the ureus, the winged disk, the bent staff, or shepherd's crook, or sem, the ansated cross, a sort of ring to which a small cross is suspended; the spearhead and whip, emblems of power; the fish; the eye of Osiris.

In the Egyptian ornamental flora, the most common element is the lotus flower, full-blown or in bud.

Wild goats, geese, apes, gazelles are the animals most frequently repeated. Animal forms are often met with in furniture. These seats stand on feet like the four paws of an animal, represented as they would exist in the animal itself. It has even been said that there were beds in the form of a lion, of which the uplifted tail sustained the hanging curtains. It is, however, in the setting of glass incrustations between raised metal ribs on metal plates; in damaskened work; in the decoration of wooden surfaces with carved designs inlaid with paste incrustations; the gilding of woodwork, leather, papyrus; the manufacture of textiles, glassware, enameled pottery in pale blue, green and white tones; the engraving of precious substances, even the hardest, that the arts of Egypt have most nearly reached the foremost rank.

The ancient Egyptians were very skillful in the art of manufacturing furnishings and other objects from wood, and from their tombs have been collected many household objects and pieces of furniture, which are shaped with an antique grace peculiar to the dwellers in the valley of the Nile.

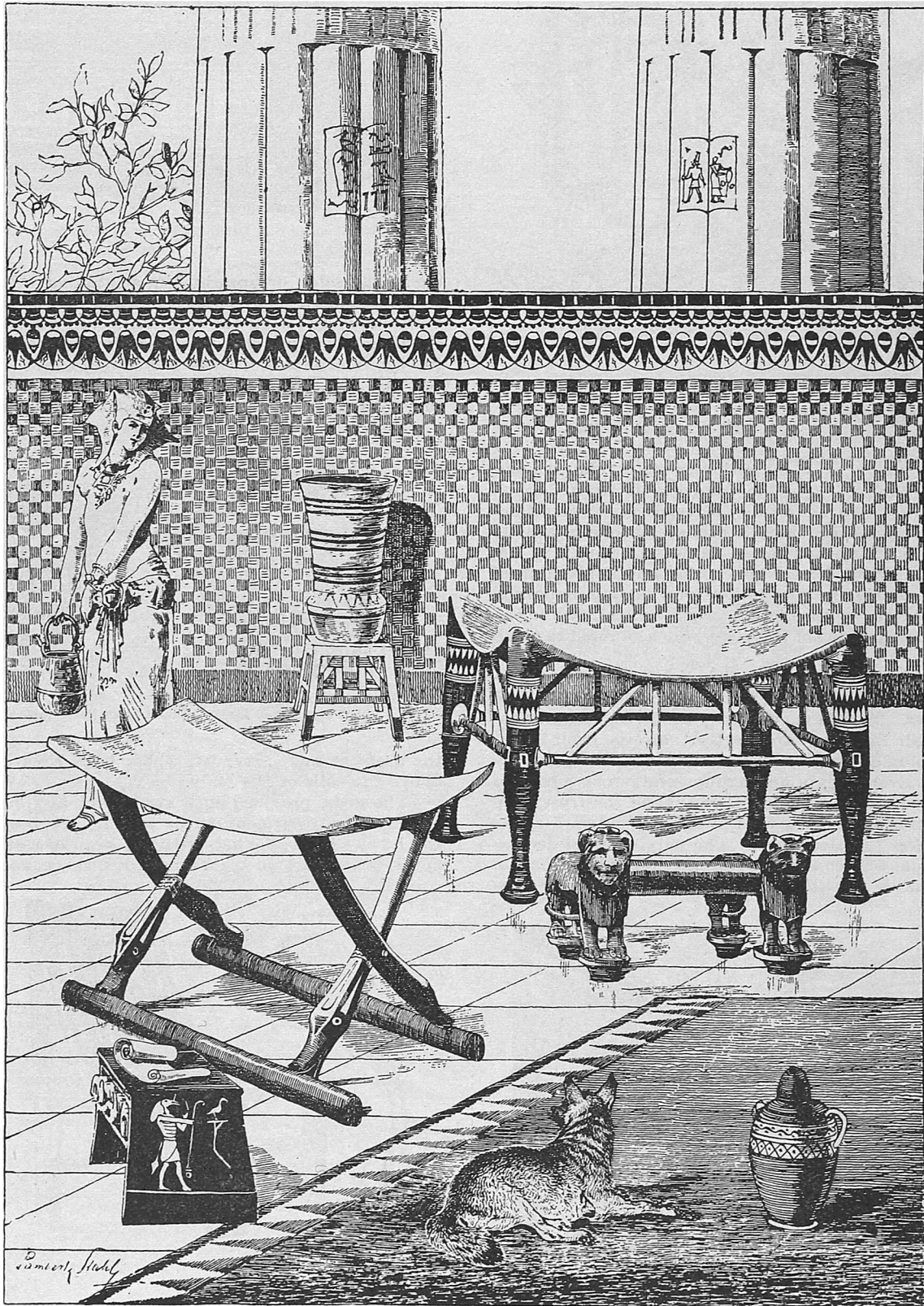
Various museums are rich in Egyptian furniture which possesses great artistic sentiment, the form being elegant, vigorous and fine, and the decoration often consisting of incrustations of ivory enamel and other precious materials.

The original of the two seats shown in the illustration are at present in the British museum in London. They were found at Thebes. They are of different woods and are incrustated with ivory. The footstool shown before one of the seats was part of the collection of Monsieur Marini of Paris. It is attributed to the seventh or eighth century before our era. The piece of furniture is very elegant in wood, and the supports are formed with the figures of cats boldly modeled.

The museums possess also simple seats, the construction of which shows that the various parts are held together by ligatures, and in the sketch is shown an example of a seat of this kind surmounted by a vase. In the foreground is shown the box of a scribe, upon the top of which is a roll of papyrus.

Egyptian art has had, as well as that of

other people of antiquity, a certain influence on the development of the form of modern furniture. This influence is particularly seen after the campaign of Napoleon I. in Egypt. Its effects upon the style called Empire has not been either happy nor durable, which is largely due to the fact that modern designers are called upon to imitate in small objects the forms of monuments of vast dimensions, and of symbolic decorations that have no place in modern civilization.



An Egyptian Interior, from "Das Mobil."